John Wesley's
Calm Address
to our
American Colonies
1776

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A CALM

# ADDRESS

TO

# *OUR AMERICAN*

# COLONIES.

By *JOHN WESLEY*, M.A.

Ne, pueri, ne tanta animis assuescite bella,
Neu patriæ validas in viscera vertite viris.

VIRGIL.

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# A CALM

# ADDRESS, &c.

BRETHREN and COUNTRYMEN,

1. THE grand queſtion which is now debated, (and with warmth enough on both ſides) is this, Has the Engliſh Parliament power to tax the American Colonies?

In order to determine this, let us conſider the nature of our Colonies. An Engliſh Colony is, a number of perſons to whom the King grants a charter, permitting them to ſettle in ſome far country as a

corporation, enjoying ſuch powers as the charter grants, to be adminiſtered in ſuch a manner as the charter preſcribes. As a corporation they make laws for themſelves: but as a corporation ſubſiſting by a grant from higher authority, to the control of that authority, they ſtill continue ſubject.

Conſidering this, nothing can be more plain, than that the ſupreme power in England has a legal right of laying any tax upon them for any end beneficial to the whole empire.

2. But you object, "It is the privilege of a Freeman and an Engliſhman to be taxed only by his own conſent. And this conſent is given for every man by his repreſentative in parliament. But we have no repreſentation in parliament. Therefore we ought not to be taxed thereby."

I anſwer, This argument proves too much. If the parliament cannot tax you, becauſe you have no repreſentation therein, for the ſame reaſon it can make no laws to bind you.

you. If a freeman cannot be taxed without his own consent, neither can he be punished without it: for whatever holds with regard to taxation, holds with regard to all other laws. Therefore he who denies the English Parliament the power of taxation, denies it the right of making any laws at all. But this power over the Colonies you have never disputed: you have always admitted statutes, for the punishment of offences, and for the preventing or redressing of inconveniences. And the reception of any law draws after it by a chain which cannot be broken, the necessity of admitting taxation.

3. But I object to the very foundation of your plea. That "every freeman is governed by laws to which he has consented," as confidently as it has been asserted, it is absolutely false. In wide-extended dominions, a very small part of the people are concerned in making laws. This, as all public business, must be done by delegation,

the delegates are chosen by a select number. And those that are not electors, who are far the greater part, stand by, idle and helpless spectators.

The case of electors is little better. When they are near equally divided, almost half of them must be governed, not only without, but even against their own consent.

And how has any man consented to those laws, which were made before he was born? Our consent to these, nay and to the laws now made even in England, is purely passive. And in every place, as all men are born the subjects of some state or other, so they are born, passively, as it were consenting to the laws of that state. Any other than this kind of consent, the condition of civil life does not allow.

4. But you say, You *are intitled to life, liberty and property by nature: and that you have never ceded to any sovereign power, the right to dispose of these without your consent.*

While

While you ſpeak as the naked ſons of nature, this is certainly true. But you preſently declare, Our *anceſtors at the time they ſettled theſe Colonies, were intitled to all the rights of natural-born ſubjects, within the realm of England.* This likewiſe is true: but when this is granted, the boaſt of original rights is at an end. You are no longer in a ſtate of nature, but ſink down to Coloniſts, governed by a charter. If your anceſtors were ſubjects, they acknowledged a Sovereign: if they had a right to Engliſh privileges, they were accountable to Engliſh laws, and had *ceded* to the King and Parliament, *the power of diſpoſing without their conſent*, of both *their lives, liberties and properties.* And did the Parliament cede to them, a diſpenſation from the obedience, which they owe as natural ſubjects? Or any degree of independence, not enjoyed by other Engliſhmen?

5. *They did not* indeed, as you obſerve, *by emigration forfeit any of thoſe privileges: but they were, and their deſcendents now are intitled*

*to all such as their circumstances enable them to enjoy.*

That they who form a Colony by a lawful charter, forfeit no privilege thereby, is certain. But what they do not forfeit by any judicial sentence, they may lose by natural effects. When a man voluntarily comes into America, he may lose what he had when in Europe. Perhaps he had a right to vote for a knight or burgess: by crossing the sea he did not *forfeit* this right. But it is plain, he has made the exercise of it no longer possible. He has reduced himself from a voter to one of the innumerable multitude that have no votes.

6. But you say, *As the Colonies are not represented in the British Parliament, they are entitled to a free power of legislation. For they inherit all the right which their ancestors had of enjoying all the privileges of Englishmen.*

They do inherit all the privileges which their ancestors had: but they can inherit no more. Their ancestors left a country where the representatives of the people were

were elected by men particularly qualified, and where those who wanted that qualification were bound by the decisions of men whom they had not deputed. You are the descendants of men who either had no votes, or resigned them by emigration. You have therefore exactly what your ancestors left you: not a vote in making laws, nor in chusing legislators, but the happiness of being protected by laws, and the duty of obeying them.

What your ancestors did not bring with them, neither they nor their descendants have acquired. They have not, by abandoning their right in one legislature, acquired a right to constitute another: any more than the multitudes in England who have no vote, have a right to erect a Parliament for themselves.

7. However the *Colonies have a right to all the privileges granted them by royal charters, or secured to them by provincial laws.*

The first clause is allowed: they have certainly a right to all the privileges granted

them by the royal charters. But as to the ſecond there is a doubt: provincial laws may grant privileges to individuals of the province. But ſurely no province can confer provincial privileges on itſelf! They have a right to all which the King has given them; but not to all which they have given themſelves.

A corporation can no more aſſume to itſelf, privileges which it had not before, than a man can, by his own act and deed, aſſume titles or dignities. The legiſlature of a Colony may be compared to the veſtry of a large pariſh: which may lay a ceſs on its inhabitants, but ſtill regulated by the law: and which (whatever be its internal expences) is ſtill liable to taxes laid by ſuperior authority.

The charter of Pennſylvania has a clauſe admitting, in expreſs terms, taxation by Parliament. If ſuch a clauſe be not inſerted in other charters, it muſt be omitted as not neceſſary; becauſe it is manifeſtly implied in the very nature of ſubordinate government

vernment: all countries which are subject to laws, being liable to taxes.

It is true, the first settlers in *Massachusetts-Bay* were promised *an exemption from taxes for seven years*. But does not this very exemption imply, that they were to pay them afterwards?

If there is in the charter of any Colony a clause exempting them from taxes for ever, then undoubtedly they have a right to be so exempted. But if there is no such clause, then the English Parliament has the same right to tax them as to tax any other English subjects.

8. All that impartially consider what has been observed, must readily allow, that the English Parliament has undoubted right to tax all the English Colonies.

But whence then is all this hurry and tumult? Why is America all in an uproar? If you can yet give yourselves time to think, you will see, the plain case is this.

A few years ago, you were aſſaulted by enemies, whom you were not well able to reſiſt. You repreſented this to your Mother-country, and deſired her aſſiſtance. You was largely aſſiſted, and by that means wholly delivered from all your enemies.

After a time, your Mother-country deſiring to be reimburſed for ſome part of the large expence ſhe had been at, laid a ſmall tax (which ſhe had always a right to do) on one of her Colonies.

But how is it poſſible, that the taking this reaſonable and legal ſtep, ſhould have ſet all America in a flame?

I will tell you my opinion freely; and perhaps you will not think it improbable. I ſpeak the more freely, becauſe I am unbiaſſed: I have nothing to hope or fear from either ſide. I gain nothing either by the Government or by the Americans, and probably never ſhall. And I have no prejudice to any man in America: I love you as my brethren and countrymen.

9. My opinion is this. We have a few men in England, who are determined enemies to Monarchy. Whether they hate his preſent Majeſty on any other ground, than becauſe he is a King, I know not. But they cordially hate his office, and have for ſome years been undermining it with all diligence, in hopes of erecting their grand idol, their dear Commonwealth upon its ruins. I believe they have let very few into their deſign: (although many forward it, without knowing any thing of the matter) but they are ſteadily purſuing it, as by various other means, ſo in particular by inflammatory papers, which are induſtriouſly and continually diſperſed, throughout the town and country: by this method they have already wrought thouſands of the people, even to the pitch of madneſs. By the ſame, only varied according to your circumſtances, they have likewiſe inflamed America. I make no doubt, but theſe very men are the original cauſe of the preſent breach

breach between England and her Colonies. And they are ſtill pouring oil into the flame, ſtudiouſly incenſing each againſt the other, and oppoſing under a variety of pretences, all meaſures of accommodation. So that although the Americans, in general, love the Engliſh, and the Engliſh in general, love the Americans, (all, I mean that are not yet cheated and exaſperated by theſe artful men) yet the rupture is growing wider every day, and none can tell where it will end.

Theſe good men hope it will end, in the total defection of North America from England. If this were effected, they truſt the Engliſh in general would be ſo irreconcileably diſguſted, that they ſhould be able, with or without foreign aſſiſtance, intirely to overturn the government: eſpecially while the main of both the Engliſh and Iriſh forces, are at ſo convenient a diſtance.

10. But, my brethren, would this be any advantage

advantage to *you ?* Can *you* hope for a more desirable form of government, either in England or America, than that which you now enjoy ? After all the vehement cry for liberty, what more liberty can you have ? What more religious liberty can you desire, than that which you enjoy already ? May not every one among you worship God according to his own conscience ? What civil liberty can you desire, which you are not already possessed of ? Do not you sit without restraint, *every man under his own vine ?* Do you not, every one, high or low, enjoy the fruit of your labour ? This is real, rational liberty, such as is enjoyed by Englishmen alone ; and not by any other people in the habitable world. Would the being independent of England make you more free ? Far, very far from it. It would hardly be possible for you to steer clear, between anarchy and tyranny. But suppose, after numberless dangers and mischiefs, you should settle into one or more Republics : would a republican go-

vernment give you more liberty, either religious or civil? By no means. No governments under heaven are ſo deſpotic as the Republican: no ſubjects are governed in ſo arbitrary a manner, as thoſe of a Commonwealth. If any one doubt of this, let him look at the ſubjects of Venice, of Genoa, or even of Holland. Should any man talk or write of the Dutch government as every cobler does of the Engliſh, he would be laid in irons, before he knew where he was. And then wo be to him! Republics ſhew no mercy.

11. "But if we ſubmit to one tax, more will follow." Perhaps ſo, and perhaps not. But if they did; if you were taxed (which is quite improbable) equal with Ireland or Scotland, ſtill were you to prevent this by renouncing connection with England, the remedy would be worſe than the diſeaſe. For O! what convulſions muſt poor America feel, before any other government was ſettled? Innumerable miſchiefs muſt enſue,

before

before any general form could be eſtabliſhed. And the grand miſchief would enſue, when it was eſtabliſhed; when you had received a yoke, which you could not ſhake off.

12. Brethren, open your eyes! Come to yourſelves! Be no longer the dupes of deſigning men. I do not mean any of your countrymen in America: I doubt whether any of theſe are in the ſecret. The deſigning men, the Ahithophels, are in England; thoſe who have laid their ſcheme ſo deep and covered it ſo well, that thouſands who are ripening it, ſuſpect nothing at all of the matter. Theſe well-meaning men, ſincerely believing, that they are ſerving their country, exclaim againſt grievances, which either never exiſted, or are aggravated above meaſure, and thereby inflame the people more and more, to the wiſh of thoſe who are behind the ſcene. But be not you duped any longer: do not ruin yourſelves for them that owe you no good will, that now employ

employ you only for their own purpoſes, and in the end will give you no thanks. They love neither England nor America, but play one againſt the other, in ſubſerviency to their grand deſign, of overturning the Engliſh government. Be warned in time. Stand and conſider before it is too late; before you have entailed confuſion and miſery on your lateſt poſterity. Have pity upon your mother country! Have pity upon your own! Have pity upon yourſelves, upon your children, and upon all that are near and dear to you! Let us not bite and devour one another, leſt we be conſumed one of another! O let us follow after peace! Let us put away our ſins; the real ground of all our calamities! Which never will or can be thoroughly removed, till we fear God and honour the King.

A Sermon preached by Dr. Smith, in Philadelphia, has been lately reprinted in England. It has been much admired, but proceeds all along upon wrong ſuppoſitions. Theſe are confuted in the preceding tract: yet I would juſt touch upon them again.

Dr. Smith ſuppoſes, 1. They "have a right of granting their own money:" that is, of being exempt from taxation by the ſupreme power. If they "contend for" this, they contend for neither more nor leſs than independency. Why then do they talk of their "rightful Sovereign?" They acknowledge no Sovereign at all.

That they contend for "the cauſe of liberty" is another miſtaken ſuppoſition. What liberty do you want, either civil or religious?

religious? You had the very ſame liberty we have in England. I ſay, you *had:* but you have now thrown away the ſubſtance, and retain only the ſhadow. You have no liberty, civil or religious now, but what the Congreſs pleaſes to allow.

But you juſtly ſuppoſe, "We are by a plain *original contract* intitled to a community of privileges, with our brethren that reſide in England, in every civil and religious reſpect," p. 19. Moſt true. And till you appointed your New Sovereigns, you enjoyed all thoſe privileges. Indeed you had no vote for members of Parliament, neither have I, becauſe I have no freehold in England. Yet the being taxed by the Parliament is no infringement either of my civil or religious liberty.

But you ſay again, "No power on earth has a right to grant our property *without our conſent,*" p. 22.

Then you have no Sovereign: for every Sovereign under heaven has a right to tax his

his ſubjects: that is, "to grant their property, with or *without their conſent*." Our * Sovereign has a right to tax me, and all other Engliſhmen, whether we have votes for Paliament-men or no.

Vainly therefore do you complain of "unconſtitutional exactions, violated rights, and mutilated charters," p. 24. Nothing is exacted, but according to the original conſtitution both of England, and her Colonies. Your rights are no more violated than mine, when we are both taxt by the ſupreme power: and your charters are no more mutilated by this, than is the charter of the city of London.

Vainly do you complain of being "made ſlaves." Am I, or two millions of Engliſhmen made ſlaves becauſe we are taxed without our own conſent?

You

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* That is, in connexion with the Lords and Commons.

You may ſtill "rejoice in the common rights of freemen." I rejoice in all the rights of my anceſtors. And every right which I enjoy, is common to Engliſhmen and Americans.

But ſhall we "ſurrender any part of the privileges which we enjoy, by the *expreſs terms* of our colonization?" that is, of our charter? By no means: and none requires it of you. None deſires to withold any thing that is granted by the *expreſs terms* of your charters. But remember! One of your firſt charters, that of Maſſachuſetts-Bay, ſays in *expreſs terms*, you are exempt from paying taxes to the King, for *ſeven years:* plainly implying, that after thoſe ſeven years you are to pay them like other ſubjects. And remember your laſt charter, that of Pennſylvania, ſays, in *expreſs terms*, you are liable to taxation.

But "a people will reſume, you ſay, the power, which they never ſurrendered, except---No need of any exception. They never

never ſurrendered it at all; they could not ſurrender it; for they never had it. I pray did *the People*, unleſs you mean the Norman army, give William the Conqueror his power? And to which of his ſucceſſors did *the people* of England (ſix or ſeven millions) give the ſovereign power? This is mere political cant: words without meaning. I know but one inſtance in all hiſtory, wherein *the people* gave the ſovereign power to any one; that was, to *Maſſaniello* of *Naples*. And I deſire any man living to produce another inſtance in the hiſtory of all nations.

Ten times over, in different words, you "profeſs yourſelves to be contending for liberty." But it is a vain, empty profeſſion: unleſs you mean by that threadbare word, a liberty from obeying your rightful Sovereign, and from keeping the fundamental laws of your country. And this undoubtedly it is, which the confederated Colonies are now contending for.

THE END.